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SUBJECT: THOUSANDS OF COLOMBIANS YELL "NO MORE CHAVEZ!"

SUMMARY

¶11. A group calling itself "No More Chavez" launched protests across Colombia and around the world on September 4 against the Government of Venezuela. Protesters demanded that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez stay out of Colombia, grouped him with the terrorist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), said "Latin America has had enough," and urged Venezuelans to "wake up" and halt his "dictatorship." The largest marches in Colombia were in Bogota, where Poloff saw a couple thousand participants, and in Cali, where a national news station estimated 5,000 participants. Media outlets reported smaller demonstrations in other cities. The Venezuelan Ambassador spoke out against the protests in the local media. End Summary.

CHAVEZ INSULTS SPARK ORGANIZERS

¶12. Colombians across the country gathered to march against the Government of Venezuela on September 4. The name of the organization behind the marches and the principal chant was "No More Chavez!" The lead promoter, Alejandro Gutierrez, claimed in the media that No More Chavez organized protests in 100 cities worldwide, including 30 in Colombia and 18 in the United States. The idea for the protests began when four youth groups were offended when President Hugo Chavez called Colombians "traitors" and invited them to join his Bolivarian revolution in his weekly television show "Hello President." The organizers used Facebook (the page has nearly 200,000 fans), Twitter, YouTube, and other websites, and claim that over one million people worldwide joined the protest network.

Juan David Lacouture created the Facebook page, which refers to Chavez as a "totalitarian communist, militarist and demagogue who has failed to deliver on his promises, violated fundamental rights, meddled in the affairs of other Latin American countries, threatened Venezuela's economy and democracy, illegally silenced opponents, and destabilized global oil prices." Rodrigo Obregon, director of the "Wounded Colombia" Foundation, also helped organize the rallies.

BOGOTA DEMANDS CHAVEZ STAY OUT OF COLOMBIA

¶3. The anti-Chavez rally in Bogota was peaceful and somewhat dispersed, as there were three meeting points in the city. Only about 500 participants had joined at the noon start time, but Poloff watched the number swell to a couple thousand three hours later. The most common chant and (white) T-shirt slogan was "No More Chavez!" The protesters also called Chavez a "narcoterrorist," "fascist," "socialist," "dictator," and "demented." Many of the banners grouped Chavez with the FARC, or demanded that Chavez stay out of Colombia (e.g., "No More Deaths - No More FARC - No More Chavez," "Chavez Go Home," "Shut Up Chavez," and "Chavez Demobilize"). One large banner read, "To Hell with the Sukhois," referring to Venezuelan military aircraft that Chavez has threatened to use against Colombia. The rallyists also urged Venezuelans to "wake up" and said "Latin America Has Had Enough" of Chavez. Some individuals carried pro-Uribe signs and one held a large American flag in the central rally location. Poloff also saw a group of Hondurans participating and waving Honduran flags. A more extremist-looking group of about 40 protesters wearing black and representing a group called the Third Force (Tercera Fuerza) linked Chavez to the Colombian far-leftist Polo Party.

¶4. Although youth predominated, there were protesters of all ages and of several nationalities. In addition to the formal protesters, there were hundreds of supportive onlookers along the rally route and many passing vehicles honked their approval. Poloff did not observe any pro-Chavez individuals or hear any remarks criticizing the rally. The press described one group of anti-Uribe demonstrators that briefly engaged the anti-Chavez rallyists without incident. A sizeable number of police patrolled the rally's periphery.

PROTESTS IN OTHER COLOMBIAN CITIES

¶5. Media reports indicate that the protests in the rest of Colombia have also been peaceful. The largest march thus far has been in Cali, where Caracol TV reported that more than 5,000 protesters marched to the Central Administrative Plaza. The protest dispersed shortly thereafter as they lacked permission from the city government to enter the plaza. Protests in Medellin, Barranquilla (about 500 individuals), Cucuta, and other cities were reportedly much smaller, with only "dozens" in some locations.

VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR BLAMES AMERICAN EMPIRE

¶6. Venezuela's Ambassador to Colombia, Gustavo Marquez, told a local radio station on September 4 that the marches represent a "campaign of hate," are an attempt to "divert attention from core issues," and are an act of disrespect to "polarize opinion." He went on to claim that the marches served the "American Empire that seeks to divide us." Chavez had earlier called the marches "stupid." Brownfield